



Why do young people misuse prescription drugs?

Taking prescription medication in a manner not prescribed (non-medical use) by a doctor is illegal, dangerous, and sometimes deadly. When it comes to prescription medication, young people often have a false sense of security that these drugs are safe.

According to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America’s 18th Annual Tracking Survey, nearly one-third of teens believe there is “nothing wrong” with using prescription drugs “once in a while.” Two in five teens think that taking someone else’s prescription drugs is safer than using illegal drugs.

“Generation Rx: National Study Confirms Abuse of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs,” The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, May 2005, [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

What can parents do?

According to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, teens who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50 percent less likely to use drugs. Make sure your children understand that:

- Your family has rules about underage drinking and illegal use of prescription drugs or other drug use.
- Taking medication that is not prescribed to them by a doctor is just as dangerous as taking illicit drugs or alcohol.
- OxyContin is a narcotic drug, like heroin, and when it is used improperly, it has the same physical and psychological effects as heroin.
- Prescription medications should only be used under the supervision of a doctor. Under no circumstance is it safe to use someone else’s prescription drug.
- Narcotic pain relievers and other prescription drugs can be highly addictive, potentially deadly and must only be taken under a physician’s care.

What can parents do? (continued)

With more than half of teens reporting that prescription drugs are easy to obtain, parents should follow these suggested guidelines:

- Safeguard all prescription medications in the household. Remove them from the medicine cabinet and place them out of reach of children and teens.
- When a family member receives a prescription, ask the doctor or pharmacist if the medication has the potential for abuse. Keep control of all medications.
- If your child must take a prescription during school hours, arrange for them to receive it from the school nurse. Make sure that all unused medication is returned to you.
- Ask the pharmacist how to safely dispose of unused medications.

Communication with teens can be challenging. It is important to remain clear and consistent regarding your rules about alcohol and drug use and to reward your child when they are doing well.

- If you see changes in your relationship that make you sense that something is wrong, take action. You may want to talk to your child to share your concern, or contact one of the listed resources for more information. Guides are available to help parents make the most of the powerful impact they have on their children and teens.
- Be available for your child, and remain open should they approach you to discuss alcohol and other drug use.

Where do they get them?

Teens report that controlled prescription drugs are more accessible to them than tobacco, alcohol or other illegal drugs. Prescription medications are easily obtained from medicine cabinets, both in their homes and in their friends’ homes. In addition, teens report that they are given the drugs by friends who have a prescription medication.

“Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Controlled Prescription Drugs in the U.S.,” National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, July 2005, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org)

help is available!

If you are concerned about yourself, a friend, or family member who may be abusing alcohol or other drugs, please call for information or treatment options:

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline  
1-800-327-5050  
[www.helpline-online.com](http://www.helpline-online.com)

For more information on the prevention and treatment of alcohol and other drug use, contact:

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
[www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas](http://www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas)

Resources

For detailed information, including free guides, pictures, signs of abuse, and how to talk to your child about the dangers of prescription drugs, check the following websites:

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse  
The Medical Foundation  
[www.maclearinghouse.com](http://www.maclearinghouse.com)  
1-800-952-6637

Drug Enforcement Administration  
[www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov)

National Institute on Drug Abuse  
[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

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PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Prescription Drug Abuse

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What Parents Need to Know

A third of teens believe that there is nothing wrong with taking prescription drugs. 62% of teens say they get prescription drugs from home. 2 in 5 teens believe that taking someone else’s prescription drugs is safer than using illegal drugs. Teens report that controlled prescription drugs are more accessible to them than tobacco, alcohol or other illegal drugs. More than half of teens



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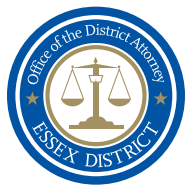
## Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem.

According to a 2005 study conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, the number of Americans who abuse or use prescription drugs illegally now exceeds the number of Americans who abuse cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, and heroin combined. The study also reported that the number of teens who abuse prescription drugs has nearly tripled since 1992.\*

As District Attorney, I am often approached by citizens who share with me heartbreaking stories of lives lost or destroyed as a result of drug abuse. The stories frequently begin with a teen who started using prescription drugs illegally because he or she believed that prescription drugs were “safe.” Unfortunately, the stories often ended with tragic results. The teen became addicted to the prescription drug, switched to using other illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin, or lost their life after an overdose. These sad stories usually end with “I wish I had known more...”

For this reason, my office has prepared this brochure. Everyone – teenagers, parents, educators, and others – need to understand that taking prescription drugs, in a way that is not prescribed by a health care professional, is illegal, unsafe, addictive, and possibly fatal. Please review this information and share it with those around you. You could save someone’s life.

– Jonathan W. Blodgett, Essex District Attorney



\* “Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Controlled Prescription Drugs in the U.S.,” National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, July 2005, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org)

## How do I know if my child is abusing prescription drugs?

Mood swings and unpredictable behavior are sometimes evidence of teenage “growing pains,” but they can also point to use of alcohol or other drugs. Be aware of any unexplained changes.

### Some of the symptoms of prescription drug abuse are:

- Opioids or narcotic pain relievers may cause drowsiness, nausea, constipation, confusion, slowed breathing, and sometimes cause severe respiratory depression and death.
- Stimulants can cause nervousness, insomnia, reduced appetite, and weight loss, and increases in heart rate, blood pressure, and energy.
- Depressants can cause slowed pulse and breathing, lowered blood pressure, poor concentration, fatigue, confusion, and impaired coordination, memory, and judgment.

*National Institute on Drug Abuse, [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)*

### Signs that your child may be using alcohol or other drugs are:

- Association with a new group of friends that concern you or that you don’t know.
- Grades are slipping.
- Loss of interest in hobbies, sports, or other favorite activities.
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns.
- Lack of personal grooming.
- Hostile, uncooperative behavior.
- Frequently late for curfew.
- Red-rimmed eyes and a runny nose, but no allergies or a cold.
- Household money, prescription drugs or cough medicines are disappearing.

*The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)*

## Types of Prescription Drugs

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the following categories of prescription medications are the most commonly abused:

- **Narcotic Pain Medications (Opioids)** are prescribed to manage chronic or severe pain. Brand and generic names include: Codeine, Demerol (Meperidine), Dilaudid (Hydromorphone), Morphine, OxyContin (Oxycodone) and Vicodin (Hydrocodone).
- **Stimulants** are prescribed to treat conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Brand and generic names include: Adderall (Dextroamphetamine and Amphetamine), Dexedrine (Dextroamphetamine) and Ritalin (Methylphenidate).
- **Depressants** are prescribed to treat conditions such as anxiety and acute stress reaction, panic attacks and stress disorders. Brand and generic names include: Ativan (Lorazepam), Nembutal (Pentobarbital Sodium), Valium (Diazepam) and Xanax (Alprazolam).

While these are currently the most commonly abused prescription drugs, it is important to remain informed of the latest drug trends as they are always changing.

*National Institute on Drug Abuse, February 2005.*

*Prescription Medications, March 2005, [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)*

# it's the law!

Using a prescription drug in a manner that is not prescribed is against the law.

If your child has prescription drugs that are not his, he could be arrested for illegal possession of drugs.

If your child gives her prescription drugs to someone else, she could be charged with illegal distribution of a controlled substance.

Possession or distribution of a drug on school property could result in stiff penalties and, in some cases, a mandatory jail sentence.

